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BOOKS & THE ARTS

CIA: Can We Reform It? Can We Aff?

1. Watching the Watchmen

INSIDE THE COMPANY: CIA Diary.
By Philip Agee. Penguin Books, Ltd.
640 pp. 95 pence.

Rep. Michael J. Harrington

Like corpses sent to the bottom of a river, stories of CIA wrongdoing were bound to come to the surface eventually. But few critics would have predicted that so much incriminating evidence could float to the top in just half a year.

It has been about that long since revelations of CIA activity in Chile first made front-page news, coinciding with numerous articles and books attempting to penetrate the fog surrounding the U.S. intelligence community. Since then, accounts of widespread domestic surveillance have stimulated the public's interest all the more, finally provoking the Congress to take action.

The Central Intelligence Agency, for its part, took the counteroffensive early. When *The CIA: The Cult of Intelligence* was in proof, the agency had portions censored, claiming that the authors, John Marks and Victor Marchetti, were not allowed to use certain information because of the secrecy oaths they signed when they were on the inside. As a result, the book was published with gaps of white space where sensitive information was deleted.

Now another damning book by a former CIA agent has come out, but this one requires no filling-in of the blanks. Unlike the Marks-Marchetti book, it couldn't be censored because the author, Philip Agee, gave the publication rights for the first edition to a British publishing company and does not plan to return to the United States until it is published here—which it will be, because publishers don't sign secrecy oaths.

When it appears in American bookstores, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, even though it is long and detailed, will

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probably be as successful as it has been in the British Commonwealth. In fact, it may be for just this reason that it has succeeded. Public curiosity has been aroused but far from satisfied by the limited accounts available thus far.

To those who have followed the CIA or U.S.-Latin American politics more than casually, much of Agee's information is at least predictable. For the experts, much was common knowledge. Almost since the beginning of the Republic, the United States has manhandled Latin American nations, and the potential dimensions of CIA activity have been recognized since the agency was created at the start of the cold war in 1947. What shocks us in Agee's book are the specifics. Based on the quality and quantity of the CIA's operations in just three Latin American nations, the worldwide possibilities are staggering.

Written in diary form (though the author admits to having reconstructed his twelve-year association with "the Company"), Agee traces his development from a Midwestern Catholic university through tours with Air Force intelligence at the beginning of his CIA career to specialized covert training, assignments in Ecuador, Uruguay, Washington, D.C. and Mexico, and ultimately, to his estrangement from the agency. The concluding chapters, describing the tribulations of writing the book with CIA harassment, demonstrate the CIA's less-than-official attempts at censorship.

Agee's stories of the life of an agent run from the mundane to the bizarre. Hours are spent opening and reading mail; intricate plans are made to coerce potential informants. And, like every organization man, Agee tells of playing golf with the boss and worrying about promotions.

Of course, each bureaucracy has its stories to tell, but behind the anecdotes in Agee's account lies a bigger story—one of buying and selling state officials (Agee lists four Latin American Presidents) and of governing governments (Agee relates the CIA's manipulation of Ecuador's political parties, press and military which resulted in the 1963 coup).

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intelligence field to help implement foreign policy and protect national security."

At the bottom of this response is an "anything goes" mentality that fails to draw a distinction between intelligence gathering and covert intervention. Congress shares the blame for the repercussions of this thinking. Neither the House nor the Senate has seriously pondered the implications of lumping benign intelligence activity with aggressive subversion. In fact, oversight committees, by refusing over the years to ask pertinent questions about CIA operations, have not faced the fact that both exist.

Consequently, CIA operations have been guided by only one rule: don't get caught. The result has been intervention such as Agee describes in Ecuador and Uruguay, neither of which poses even the remotest hemispheric threat to our "national security."

Olin Robinson of Bowdoin College has explained the phenomenon simply: "The CIA suffers from a syndrome which might be labeled 'all dressed up and nowhere to go.' It is an organization with extraordinary capabilities employing some of the most talented people in government service (the Watergate personalities notwithstanding). The natural bureaucratic tendency is toward self-perpetuation, and no large organization is likely to change its policies and operations without external pressure to do so."

Since Agee started his book three years ago, the serious threat to the nation's

Harrington, Michael

CIA/104 Agee, Philip

See 4.01.2 Inside the Company: CIA Diary

Higgins, James

CIA/104 Marchetti, Victor

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P-Poerty, L. Fletcher

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CIA/101 Helms, Richard

(Long under Harrington)